The Berkshire Echo

The Newsletter of Berkshire Record Office

NO. 9 SPRING 1999

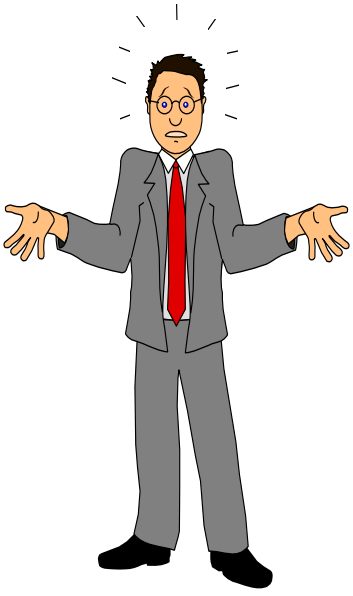
What's New?

Recent visitors will have noticed that Foster Wheeler has completed the refurbishment of its reception area, and visitors now come in to the building through the main entrance, as before, rather than via the temporary entrance round the side of the building. Although the refurbished entrance is not quite as convenient for the Record Office the temporary entrance was, there is a lot more space - at times the temporary reception area was bursting at the seams. Now that things have returned to normal, we have gone back to closing at 9.00 p.m. on Thursday evenings instead of at 8.50.

Elizabeth Hughes

A Wayward Register

As you may know, the Record Office undertakes limited searches on payment of an hourly fee for those who cannot get here themselves. One recent enquiry about the Lush family of Sparsholt in the 16th and 17th centuries led us to a discovery which we were surprised not to have come across before. Most peculiarly, this parish's earliest register, which runs from 1558 to 1734, is arranged alphabetically by initial of *first* name: the first pages, for example, carry baptisms, marriages and burials of all the Alices, Agneses, Anns and Alexanders of the parish, to be followed by the Bartholomews, Bridgets and Brians, and so on.



The entries were actually begun in 1599, which is not unusual, for the majority of parishes only then began to obey the decree to record all such events back to the start of Elizabeth's reign in 1558. From the uniform neat handwriting we can see that the minister or clerk who wrote the first entries using this idiosyncratic arrangement lived on till the 1620s, by which time his successors were stuck with it. Inevitably, however, problems arose. The space that was left for future As, Bs and Cs was not always correctly calculated. Pages then had to be numbered, and when, for example, the Johns and Janes filled their allocation at the foot of page 14 they had to jump forward to resume on page 61. Still proving too numerous they then jump back to page 60, where an insufficiency of Hs had left valuable parchment unfilled, then back to 56 (not enough Fs), then back to 26 and 27 where the original Ws had run out.

This sort of thing occurs many times in the register. The movements are clearly signalled, so if a known individual was believed to have been baptised, married or buried at Sparsholt at a particular date,

the entry which proves it can eventually be found. That, of course, was the purpose of the register. It was not anticipated that 400 years later someone would want to extract *all* Lush family entries. This simply cannot be done, short of reading every word in the volume.

Or can it? Well, yes, it can, thanks to the IGI. Three cheers for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Theirs is the *only* index available at present. Unless one of our readers would like to help our overstretched volunteers, and compile an index for us...?

Bob Hale

New Atlas Puts Berkshire on the Map

A new history of Berkshire, edited by Joan Dils, has just been published by the Berkshire Record Society. *An Historical Atlas of Berkshire* contains fifty-eight short articles by specialists from the Berkshire Record Office, the University of Reading and elsewhere, on aspects of Berkshire's history from Anglo-Saxon times to the present day. Each essay is accompanied by a map which helps illustrate the text and provides a new and unusual way of looking at the history of the county. Subjects covered include the geology and topography of Berkshire, place-names, boundaries and administrative divisions, domesday Berkshire, manors and boroughs, population, vernacular buildings and county houses, deserted medieval villages, agriculture, ecclesiastical history and church architecture, transport, local industries, crime, the Victorian poor law, education and recreation. The Atlas was launched in the Long Gallery of Englefield House, by kind permission of the Sir William Benyon, the Society's patron. Copies can be obtained from Berkshire Record Office, price £14.95 plus £2.00 postage and packing. Get your copy now while stocks last!

Peter Durrant

From the Registers

The children of soldiers at the Barracks in Windsor are sometimes found in the Windsor baptism registers. One particularly interesting entry I recently came across was the baptism on 2 July 1815 of "Daniell Son of a Soldier who was killed in Spain (& left this child with a Private in the 14th Dragoon Reg[imen]t) whose wife was a Portugese". The surname was unknown to the officiating minister.

Lisa Spurrier

Off the (Library) Shelf

Over the past year around 200 new items have been added to the Library. As well as regular subscriptions to periodicals, we have bought or been given items on a wide range of subjects, of which the following are just a sample: *Huguenot ancestry*; *Burke's Peerage 1871 and 1939* (among others); *Popular piety in the diocese of Salisbury 1250-1550*; *Dictionary of land surveyors and local mapmakers of Great Britain and Ireland 1530-1850*; *Deserted medieval villages in Berkshire*; *Clock and watchmakers in Newbury and district*; *Public health in 19th century Reading: the social response to cholera*; *History of Gordon Road school, Maidenhead*; *The Surgeon of Crowthorne* (about a Broadmoor inmate's considerable contribution to the Oxford English Dictionary); *Letter to Pippa* (reminiscences about the forge at Kingston Bagpuize); *How to trace the history of your car* (revised edition); *A village at war: White Waltham 1939-1945*; *Public hangings in Berkshire, 1735-1868*; updates of *Gibson's Guides*; and a variety of notes on family names including Dicker, Mears, Frewin, Lambden, Head, Abery, Beck and Hidden.

Almost two-thirds of this year's new additions have been received as complimentary copies or as gifts from authors or researchers, to whom, as ever, we extend our grateful thanks.

Bob Hale

The Records Centre Revealed

Not many people will know about the Modern Records Centre, which is part of Berkshire Record Office, because it does not have a public search room. However, it plays an essential role behind the scenes, as Peter Markus explains:

The Records Centre is situated (aptly or otherwise) opposite the sewage works (the source of the "Whitley Whiff") at Darwin Close, off the Basingstoke Road in Reading, a point that is reasonably accessible to the 6 unitary authorities in Berkshire who use the service. The bulk of the records we hold now are files created by Berkshire County Council. At about this time last year, during the last days of the Council, those files that were of specific relevance to particular districts (thousands of feet of records) were disaggregated to the new unitary authorities, leaving us with the records that are of county-wide relevance. We also hold administrative records of Reading Borough. For two reasons these will eventually become the dominant part of our holdings. Firstly, a large proportion of the remaining Berkshire records will eventually either be destroyed when they are of no further administrative use or will be transferred to the archives. Secondly, Reading is continuing to generate records for storage here.

The service we aim to offer is a total records management service, from the genesis of the record to its ultimate destruction or transfer to archives. We run a variety of paper and computer-based databases to manage the documents we hold, including search and retrieval when requested by any of the 6 unitary authorities. Since Reading continues to create records, and a number of records from Berkshire will remain extant for quite some time, a records management service will continue to be needed in years to come.

Peter Markus

Just Catalogued

Parish records, especially registers, are one of the most popular series held in the Record Office, so we were delighted by the recent arrival of Barkham registers of baptisms 1903-1986, and marriages 1837-1983 and 1987-1998 (D/P 13). A collection of records from Waltham St Lawrence parish church, 1909-1972, included the register of baptisms, 1962-1972 (D/P 141). Tilehurst St Michael deposited records of its Share 800+ Committee, 1987-1997 (D/P 132). We also acquired Bucklebury and Marlston parish magazines 1900-1912 (D/EX 1551); some papers of the Revd W J F K Stride, rector of Besselsleigh, relating to parish management and to his strong interest in local history, 1920-1936 (D/EX 1533); and printed posters and papers relating to a proposed new burial ground for Reading St Mary, 1852 (D/EX 1537). This proposal was rejected, and the churchyard closed in 1856 (as it would have been hazardous to health to squeeze any more bodies in). Parishioners would then have no choice but to use Reading Cemetery.

We were pleased recently by the arrival of a parcel of marriage registers for a number of closed Congregational / United Reformed churches, some of which supplemented already deposited collections. They cover Sunningdale Congregational Church, 1899-1974 (D/N 21); Bucklebury Congregational Church, 1939-1955 (D/N 41); Longworth Congregational Home Mission Chapel, 1939-1955 (D/N 42); and two Reading churches : Trinity, 1929-1978 (D/N 10), and Broad Street, 1908-1981 (D/N 11). Other nonconformist records to have been catalogued were those of Windsor and Maidenhead Wesleyan Methodist Circuit, 1819-1952 (D/MC 14). In addition, we now have in the searchroom a transcript of the registers of Slough Congregational Church, 1859-1998.

An interesting collection of deeds and papers relating to property in various parishes, 1692-1948 (D/EX 1528) has now been made available. The most significant properties covered are Caversham Grove mansion house and estate, Caversham, 1785-1920, and Endalls or Yeldhall manor and farm, Bowsey Hill, Wargrave, 1714-1948, but also included are Abingdon, Bucklebury, Burghfield, Chieveley, Frilsham, Reading, Speen, Stanford Dingley, Sulhampstead Abbots and Winkfield. Other deeds catalogued include some relating to land in Station Road, Theale, 1781-1939 (D/EX 429); property in Bath Road, Garnet Street and Whitley, Reading, 1895-1967 (D/EX 1516); and schedules of deeds of the estates of Daniel Higford Davall Burr of Aldermaston Court relating to property in Berkshire and elsewhere, made in 1878 and 1886 (D/EZ 126). A large coloured map of the estate of John Pocock in Goosey and Denchworth, 1824, has also been deposited (D/EX 1550).

More unusual new arrivals include an album of cuttings, 1895-1914, kept by Leslie Walker, manager of Reading Waterworks (D/EX 1540). As well as press cuttings relating to water supply and his family, there are several on local politics, which include the story of the adventures of the Maidenhead borough surveyor and a councillor driving a horsedrawn bus the latter had just bought in London, and picking up fares (donated to borough funds!) in 1906. We also received the commonplace book of Ellen Norman, 1885-c.1913 (D/EX 1538), and the wages book of Warwick Bros of Oxford Road, Reading, timber merchants, 1943-1945 (D/EX 1541).

Lisa Spurrier

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